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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have found that the librarian's use of book displays and recommended lists are an effective means to increase circulation in the public library. Yet conflicting results were found when these merchandising techniques were used with collection materials in the nonprint format, specifically audiobooks and videos, instead of books. This study attempted to determine whether the librarian's promotion of audiobooks would increase their circulation, and which merchandising technique would produce the preferred results: a greater increase in circulation. An experiment was conducted at four agencies of The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County to test the two-part hypothesis: the librarian's use of a poster, display, and recommended listening list would result in the increased library circulation of audiobooks; and the librarian's use of a display would produce the preferred results: a greater increase in circulation over the recommended listening list and the poster. To begin the experiment, normal audiobook circulation was monitored for a control pretest period of one month. Then a separate merchandising treatment--a poster, display, and recommended listening list-was placed at each of three different agencies; a fourth agency served as a control and used no promotional treatment at all. Again circulation was monitored for this experimental period of one month. The statistics generated revealed that there was an increase in audiobook circulation with the librarian's use of the display and recommended listening list, and the display did result in the greater increase in circulation over the poster and the recommended listening list. Yet when the data was analyzed, taking total branch circulation into consideration, the results were found not to be statistically significant. Therefore, the hypothesis could not be supported. The poster and recommended listening list are appended. (Contains 26 references.) (AEF)

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The Effect of a Poster, Display, and Recommended Listening List On the Circulation of Audiobooks in the Public Library

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library
And Information Science
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree Master of Library Science

By

Linda Kucalaba

January, 2000

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Choices, there are so many choices. Walking into the library, to a reader, can be like a trip to the candy store for a child. For nonusers (those who don't use the library), it can be as confusing as a maze. Even a library visit once a month isn't enough to familiarize patrons with everything the public library has to offer. Yet creating patron awareness of the newer additions to the collection is a responsibility and a service the library needs to address.

One of the newer audiovisual formats to become part of the library's collection is the modern audiobook. Although the popularity of books-on-cassette is growing, on the whole, a large majority of people are not aware of the many advantages that audiobooks have to offer. Through the librarian's use of merchandising techniques, such as a poster, display, and recommended listening list, greater patron awareness of the subject diversity available and the many benefits of this format may result.

Rationale/ Need for the Study

Audiobooks can fulfill the educational, informational, and recreational needs of the community in a format highly suitable to today's fast-moving society. These books-on-cassette allow people to do two things at the same time, and, for this major reason, they are gaining in popularity. For many who do not have time to sit down and read a book, they can now enjoy an audio production of a book at the same time they are driving, gardening, doing housework, and many other activities.

The problem is that although some people have discovered the benefits of listening to audiobooks, on the whole, the majority of people are not aware of the many advantages modern books-on-cassette have to offer. Many still think of audiobooks as Talking Books, a service developed for the blind and the visually impaired through which they can enjoy hearing a book. On suggesting an audiobook to my husband, his response was, "I'm not blind. I can still read a book myself; I don't need to listen to one." A similar response came from a patron at the Sebring branch of The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. This lady said she doesn't see well enough to read anymore, so she watches videos, those made from the current popular novels. When the librarian then suggested a bestseller on audio, she commented that she didn't know bestsellers were available on audio. She said she thought audiobooks were limited to the old classics in literature. So she took one home to try. Sadly, this narrow image of audiobooks is shared by many.

Yes, audiobooks were originally developed by the American Foundation for the Blind and the Library of Congress as recorded books on record albums for the blind. The narrator read the text or story, thereby fulfilling an important recreational and information need for those unable to read the printed word. These Talking Books on records were eventually replaced with the advent of the cassette player. Cassette players flourished, supporting many advantages that led to the growth in popularity of today's audiobooks (Gabriel 1998).

The modern audiobook is no longer limited to just a reading of the text of a book; the modern audiobook is considered a sound production. The narrator may be the author, reading with the voice inclinations he or she intended in the original work. In other

audio productions, a famous personality or noted narrator may read the book, providing the depth of his professional experience. Sometimes this professional narrator will also adopt different voices for different characters in the book. Many people do choose audiobooks based on who is reading the text. Yet, although some audiobooks are just a reading of the printed book, a great majority of those produced now include music with sound effects, providing the effect of an audio movie. Other audiobooks present multiple readers depicting different characters, and a combination of both full sound and multiple readers within the same production is also available (Pershing 1998).

Two choices in audiobooks are available, unabridged and abridged. Unabridged audio, now growing in popularity, presents the book exactly word-for-word as it is in the print version. An abridged audiobook is a shortened and condensed version of the original text, omitting unimportant details and unnecessary descriptions. These appeal to people who want to listen to only the story line, and are uninterested in superfluous details and unnecessary description (Whitten 1995).

The modern audiobook, as we know it, is recorded on a cassette tape and does require a cassette player, walkman, or a tape player that comes equipped in most cars, in order to be heard. An advantage of the cassette audiobook is that this format is well-suited for bookmarking. When a listener stops or turns off his cassette player and later wants to resume listening to his book, he simply presses "play" and continues listening to the story where he left off. Yet an even newer version of audiobooks, reflecting the latest technology, is the audiobook now available on CD. CD audiobooks do not support the "bookmark" feature when the CD player is turned off as do the cassettes, yet the listener can use the "pause" button for short lengths of time when there is a need

to delay listening to attend to something else and resume listening where he left off. In essence, it is the versatility of either audiobook format, its ability to be inserted into different forms of a cassette player or CD player, that lends itself to adaptability for use with today's busy lifestyles (Rosenblum 1999).

As we conclude this century, our multi-task culture is slowly discovering the benefits of audiobooks. Publishers are targeting people who like to read, but don't have the time. The Audio Publishers Association reports that 64.8% of people listen while doing something else (Pershing 1998). Drivers form the largest part of this group, and people are spending more time on the road than ever before. They are turning to audiobooks when they get tired of listening to the radio. Henry Trentman, president of Recorded Books, suggests that an audiobook "takes the drudgery out of driving" (Gabriel 1998, 1). Long-distance drivers, such as traveling salesmen, truckers, and vacationers are the heaviest users, and commuters are listening just as well. During a twenty minute commute twice a day, a listener can hear an entire abridged book of typically two cassettes, about three hours total length, in a week. In contrast, an unabridged book averages twelve tapes for up to 16 hours of listening. Yet, in addition to driving, people are also listening while jogging, cooking, gardening, exercising, doing housework and resting, just to name a few (Pershing 1998).

Publishers report that general fiction is the most popular category, with mystery and suspense following close behind. On the increase are religious/inspirational, self-help, educational, and children's titles. Yet publishers also publicize that other offerings are available, including business, foreign language, history, biography, and many, many more (Pershing 1998).

Audiobooks do offer literature, inspiration, and learning to many people who might not have had time to actually sit down and read a book. Yet they can also provide the literature experience for many who either don't enjoy reading, those who don't know how to read or are reluctant readers, and those who do not know the language well enough to read. Young people who have school assignments and have difficulty reading the classics may find they appreciate this literature when they hear the book. Even many schools have jumped on the bandwagon and use audiobooks for listening skills, as story starters, and lesson reinforcement. They have become especially important in classrooms in geographical areas where students are learning English as a second language, because it is not spoken in the home (Williams 1997).

Presentations of today's "audio programs" range from "recordings of full-cast dramatizations; traditional story-telling; lecture series; old-time radio dramas or serials; interviews or commentaries; language and study courses" (Whitten 1995, 4). With the variety and diversity available in audiobooks, there is something to benefit nearly everyone.

Yet here is where librarians can take an active role, to provide an extra service to their patrons by promoting audiobooks. Through librarian interaction by promotion within the library, people may become more aware of the subject diversity available and the many additional benefits of audiobooks. They then might consider this library format to meet their recreational and informational needs, which at the same time would lead to the increased circulation of the library's audiobook collection.

Yet promotion and display by the librarian is not a new phenomenon. Librarians have been placing books on display since before the beginning of this century. Back in

1899, Miss McGraw wrote, "it works well to leave some books on a table to be examined by patrons," describing one of her techniques to interest patrons in the library (McGraw 1899, 29). During this time librarians were attempting to elevate the public interest away from fiction novels, by promoting nonfiction (Mitchum 1993). Bessie Smith, in 1905, exemplified this attitude with her comment, "by all means have some place where the best books may be put so they are accessible" (Smith 1905, 172). Jeannette Drake, in 1909, advised readers on "Methods of Getting Nonfiction Read," with this approach: "When you are anxious for certain books to be read, keep them on the display shelves. Have a book bin or shelves of some sort near the door so that they may be easily seen" (Drake 1909, 4).

As the decades passed and librarians no longer were trying to choose the "best" books for patrons, they still used displays as merchandising techniques. As far back as 1949, O'Connor commented that "you can even keep figures on the number of books which circulate from the different displays, and these notes will be a big help in your future planning" (O'Connor 1949, 536). Yet it wasn't until the early 1970s that true scientific studies on the effect of displays on circulation began (Mitchum 1993).

Research results involving scientific studies of books and promotional techniques by librarians, including display and recommended lists, began about thirty years ago. These can be used as a basis for comparison so librarians can predict outcomes for their promotional treatments. Yet can previous findings on promotion by librarians be transferred to the audiobook format? There is a need to determine whether the promotion of audiobooks by librarians, using a poster, display and recommended list, will increase patron awareness of this format, resulting in increased circulation.

The need for this current study is especially in evidence due to the conflicting findings of previous research that has been done in this area, specifically that of Williams (1998), Bickle (1996), Goldhor (1972), and Baker (1986), just to name a few. The library promotion and display studies involving audiovisual formats, such as videocassettes and audiobooks, have shown differing results from those done in the past on books. Studies involving the display of audiovisual formats have not been found to be effective in the increase of circulation, yet previous research on the display of books reveals it is an effective promotional technique. While the promotional techniques are basically the same, there is a need to determine if a difference does in fact exist due to the format in the nonprint form. Will the librarian's use of a poster, a display, and a recommended list, affect the circulation of audiobooks? That is what this study attempts to learn.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first purpose is to determine whether the librarian's promotion of audiobooks, by the use of a poster, display, and recommended listening list, will increase audiobook circulation. The second purpose is to determine which promotional treatment by the librarian, the poster, display, or recommended list, will produce the preferred results of the greatest increase in audiobook circulation.

Findings from Goldhor's 1978-79 experiment showed that book lists were less effective than displays in increasing use. His study revealed that while displays increased use by seven percent, book lists only increased use by four times, when compared with the control group (Goldhor 1981).

Taking previous studies into consideration, therefore, the hypothesis logically follows: the librarian's use of a poster, display, and recommended listening list will result in the increased library circulation of audiobooks; the librarian's use of a display will produce the preferred results, a greater increase in circulation over the recommended listening list and the poster.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are needed for a concise understanding of the study.

An audiobook refers to any spoken-word recording on a cassette tape or CD format.

Browsing is the casual examination of books at random to find something to borrow and read, with no purposeful search for a specific title or a particular class of books (Goldhor 1981).

A patron is a library user.

A circulation is one "check-out" on loan for use outside of the library of a library material in any format.

A display is any temporary grouping of books exhibited in some way apart from the rest of the library's collection (Mitchum 1993).

Information overload is the state of being frustrated and confused when overwhelmed with too many choices at one time and experiencing difficulty making a book selection (Baker 1986c).

A narrowing device is a strategy adopted by patrons to simplify selection to a more manageable number of choices, thereby easing information overload (Baker 1986b).

A recommended listening list is a compilation of audiobook titles recommended by the librarian for patron listening, the titles often chosen from a published winners' list or from other professional sources, such as review lists.

A renewal is a "check-out" for an additional circulation period when an item is due to be returned to the library.

Stock turnover rate is the average annual circulation per physical item held, a measure of the intensity of use of the collection (Van House 1987).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the circulation of audiobooks only at the Main, Austintown, Boardman, and Canfield branches of The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. Therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to audiobook circulation at any other libraries or library branches. Also, this study measured only audiobooks, therefore these findings cannot be generalized to print and other nonprint formats.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Audiobooks are relatively new in the library collection, and this is reflected in the scarcity of previous research done on this audiovisual format. Of the few audiobook studies available, only one involves the librarian's display of audiobooks and its effects on circulation. There is a similar study involving videocassettes, but most of the previous research on merchandising by librarians is on books by the use of display and recommended reading lists. These will be used in this literature review as a basis for a merchandising comparison with the present research focusing on audiobooks.

Audiobook Studies

The most pertinent research involving the effects of a librarian's display of audiobooks on circulation was done in 1998 by Ellen Williams, a student at Kent State University. Williams took eighty-two randomly selected audiobook titles and observed their circulation over a total period of six weeks. For the first three weeks she noted their circulation when all were located on regular shelving. Then half of the titles were put on a display near the circulation desk. Once again circulation figures were monitored to compare the circulation of the titles on the display with the remaining half at their regular place on the shelves. After the total six-week experimental period her hypothesis was not supported; the audiobooks on display did not increase in circulation. In fact, total audiobook circulation decreased during the experimental period. She noted possible reasons for this result, most notably the possible need for a longer study, since

the circulation period for the audiobooks was two weeks. Also, she noted that the display, although near the circulation desk, was not in view to everyone at the desk, but to their backs (Williams 1998).

Researching audiobooks from a different angle, Kent State graduate student John Yingling conducted a survey in 1998 to study audiobook users at the Salem Public Library in Ohio. Yingling used a questionnaire issued to audiobook borrowers to construct a patron profile of audiobook users and individual borrowing practices, important information librarians can use in collection development in serving patron needs. His findings showed that the majority of audiobook listeners were female, aged 40-59, and have had at least some college education or a college degree. Most patrons surveyed preferred unabridged audiobooks over the shorter abridged versions and chose an individual title based on the subject of the book. General fiction was the favorite category chosen, with suspense and mystery a close second. Respondents did not place much importance on the reader of the book. Commuters formed the largest group of listeners, yet home listeners, who could do something else at the same time or even relax, also formed a significant group. In terms of borrowing practices, his findings revealed that the largest group of listeners did not borrow print books at all (Yingling 1998).

Then, in early 1999, Becky Davis, another Kent State graduate student, researched audiobooks from still another perspective. She conducted a study at the Akron-Summit County Public Library (ASCPL) to compare its audiobook holdings to those on the "Best Audiobooks and Audie Winners Lists 1994-1997" and to analyze their usage. Following a pretest by observation, she noted that patrons choose audiobook titles either by

browsing through the selection available, or by asking for a specific title. She then compared titles on the winners' list to holdings on the ASCPL online catalog. Then the titles that matched were compared to the list of the library's 100 most-circulated audiobook titles. Her findings showed that ASCPL owned a low percentage of award winning titles from the list, and that those award winning titles that they did own did not circulate more than titles that were not on the list. In fact, circulation was about the same for both award winning and non-award winning titles. She concluded that patrons select those audiobook titles that are available to them, without concern for the alternate formats, such as abridged, unabridged, or Books on Compac Disc, that might exist (Davis 1999).

Video Study

Then, in 1996, Craig Bickle, a graduate student at Kent State University, conducted a similar experiment involving a display and a recommended list at a community college library to test whether selected videos would increase in circulation. Bickle monitored the circulation of a selected group of videos in the Dewey 800s section that had not circulated well in the past for a ten-week period. He then divided this group of videos into three groups: one group was placed on display, the titles of the second group were on a recommended list, and the third group served as a control. The second and third groups remained on the regular shelving. Once again circulation was recorded for another ten-week period. After analyzing his data, Bickle concluded that although there was an increase in circulation of all three groups during the experimental period, the

increase was not statistically significant and could not support his hypothesis that the displayed and recommended videos would increase in circulation (Bickle 1996).

Book Display and Book List Studies

Early work studying the circulation effects of displayed books was done by Herbert Goldhor. From 1969-1970 he conducted a study in two Illinois public libraries in which he observed the circulation of 110 selected books for a year. After the first six months, in one library he pulled some of the books off of the regular shelving and displayed them in a prime location to find out if circulation would increase. He also conducted a patron survey to discover why patrons chose the books on the display. His results showed a marked increase in circulation in the library of the displayed books, up 113%. The patron survey revealed that books were selected by patrons from the display as they were browsing. Therefore, he concluded that anything that facilitates browsing, such as a display, will result in increased circulation (Goldhor 1972).

Goldhor furthered this study from 1978-79 when he repeated his previous experiment and took it a step further to include a recommended reading list. Following a three month pre-test period when circulation was monitored, he divided adult biographies into three groups: one group on special display shelves close to the circulation desk, another group had titles with brief descriptions given on a book list, and the third group as a control was left on the regular shelves. He also gave patrons a questionnaire asking how they selected books and, once again, "browsing" was the leading answer. The results of both the display and the book list experiment showed significant increases in circulation when compared with the pretest and control group.

In fact, Goldhor found that books on the display increased in circulation by seven times, while those on the book list increased in circulation by four times, when compared with the control group. Therefore, Goldhor concluded that both a display and a book list provide readers with a guidance function (narrowing strategy) to cope with information overload and help them to make selection choices of books to borrow (Goldhor 1981).

Then William Aguilar, patterning Goldhor's studies, conducted similar research in 1982 on the effect of book display on circulation, but this time in an academic library. Aguilar took a group of 100 books and randomly selected half for display the first experimental period. For the second period, he reversed the experiment, returning the display books to the shelves, and placing the half originally on the shelves, on display. Additionally, he isolated eleven variables which could influence borrowing, to determine if they could be the cause of increased circulation. Among the variables included were publication date, original publication date, number of pages, number of illustrations, condition of the book, if there was a book jacket, type of binding, number of previous circulations, if the book was a paperback, and frequency in reviewing sources. His findings showed that books on a salient display did show a significant increase in circulation, regardless of borrowing variables: the influence of borrowing variables was shown not to be statistically significant. He concluded that books on display gain greater exposure and accessibility, possibly leading to borrowing choices on impulse, which results in increased circulation of those titles (Aguilar 1982).

Also in 1982, Margaret Taylor used the public library to continue book list and display studies. She chose titles from a sample group on three topics: biographies of scientists, poetry by contemporary American women, and fiction about sports and

athletes. Then she divided these titles into two groups. Titles from the first group served as a control, and titles from the other group were included on three separate book lists and placed at the locations around the library where information and brochures were customarily available for patrons to take. Her experiment failed to show an increase in circulation of the titles included on the book list. She concluded that book lists are not effective when left for voluntary patron pick up. Then to test to make sure these titles were not chosen simply for patron apathy on the subject, Taylor then displayed books from each topic in a prominent location appropriate to each category. Her results showed that the displayed books did significantly increase in circulation. She concluded that the displays were successful because of the ease of physical accessibility (Taylor 1982).

Then from 1984-85, Sharon Baker expanded previous research with a complex experiment conducted at two smaller public libraries in Illinois, investigating the circulation effects of both display and recommendation. For a three-month pre-test period, circulation was monitored on regular shelving. She then divided the fiction books into three groups for the first experimental period: seventy five books placed on a prime display near the circulation desk, seventy five books placed on a nonprime display not easily accessible and not visible from the circulation desk, and the rest of the books remained on the regular shelves as a control. During this same three-month, first experimental period, she randomly selected thirty eight books on the prime display, thirty eight on the nonprime display, and seventy five from the regular shelving and marked them with red dots. A large sign designated that the red dots meant "recommended" at each location. All of the remaining books on the shelves with no red

dots served as a control. Circulation was monitored during this period. Then Baker took this a step further for a second experimental period with a fascinating twist; she reversed the locations and recommendations. She moved the books from the prime display to the nonprime display, and nonprime display books to the prime display. She also removed the red dots from the recommended books and marked the previously unmarked books with red dots, thereby totally reversing the previous experimental conditions. Again circulation was monitored for three-months. Baker's display results showed a dramatic increase in the circulation of all prime display books over those on the nonprime display and regular shelving, implying the increase in circulation is due to location. Results for the "recommended" books did show that they circulated more than those not recommended, but the increase was significant only at the larger of the two libraries, where the fiction collection was three times larger. Baker concluded that because of the larger collection, patrons were frustrated with information overload and needed guidance for selection; the "recommended" books served as a narrowing strategy for browsers to make their selection choices. Yet, since the results were not significant at both libraries, her hypothesis was rejected (Baker 1986a).

Baker then compared the results of several researchers to substantiate her theory dealing with patron selection of library materials. Previous studies reveal that most patrons select books by browsing. She suggests that patrons enter a library and are overwhelmed with the wide selection of materials available. To compensate for this information overload, browsers seek out ways to simplify or narrow down the selection to a number they can cope with. Since browsers, by definition, are not looking for anything specific, they are open to influence from anything. She suggests that patrons

need guidance, and librarians should help browsers ease information overload by focusing on promotional techniques that expose a small number of titles to patrons. She says this should result in the increased circulation of the selected books. Then she added that previous research has shown that book lists and displays have been shown to be effective in this way when properly designed. These narrowing strategies work because there is no effort required by the patron and require no extra time for browsers in selection. The librarian highlighting a smaller number of titles makes these titles more readily accessible for immediate use (Baker 1986b).

Baker then explained the implications of her theory and her 1984-85 study, in terms of previous scientific display studies, suggesting that "any" kind of book placed on a display in a prominent location will circulate more, because browsers are the largest selectors of books on display. Browsers select books because of ease of accessibility and to ease information overload. Displays located in high traffic areas catch the attention of browsers, are easily accessible, and also serve as a narrowing device to aid in selection, thereby easing information overload (Baker 1986c).

Then in 1986, Loriene Roy broadened previous studies to examine not only the effect of book display on circulation, but also the effect of book display on both total library circulation and the stock turnover rate. Her research at eight small public libraries in Illinois supported her hypothesis; while the actual books on display did increase in circulation, both total library circulation and the stock turnover rate did not increase significantly. So she concluded that while books on display do increase in circulation, this circulation is displaced from other areas of the collection. This may imply that patrons only intend to check out a certain number of books during each

library visit, and although book displays may guide patrons to new or little used parts of the collection, they are not incentives to check out more total books (Roy 1993).

Another experiment in 1986, this time by Nancy Parrish, set out to measure the effect of a book list on circulation. Parrish focused on fiction books which had not been borrowed from a public library in four years or longer, to determine whether book lists had the ability to increase use of non-popular titles. From a group of seventy randomly selected titles, half were put on an unannotated book list on brightly colored paper and the other half were not promoted in any way. Both groups remained at their normal shelving locations. Book lists were inserted into checked-out books, and were also available in a stand-up display at both the circulation desk and at the reference desk for patrons to pick up. Any patron checking out a title on the book list was asked to complete a short questionnaire, to identify if the book list was used in selecting that title. The findings from her experiment showed a significant increase in circulation of the titles included on the book list compared to those in the control group that were not included on the book list. From this and the questionnaire results, she concluded that the book list had the ability to increase use of non-popular titles and was the major factor influencing selection, with browsing the second factor determining selection (Parrish 1986).

This literature overview has attempted to review previous research on audiobooks and library promotion using displays and recommended lists. As has been shown, conflicting findings are evident, especially when comparing book research results with audiobook and other audiovisual materials research results. If the librarian promotes audiobooks, a rather new format, by a poster, display, and recommended listening list,

will these treatments catch the attention of browsers, ease information overload, and therefore, increase patron usage resulting in increased circulation? That is what this study attempted to find out.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This experiment determined the effect of a poster, display, and recommended listening list on the circulation of adult audiobooks in the public library. It also determined which of these promotional treatments would produce the preferred results of increased circulation. It took place at the Austintown, Boardman, Canfield and Main libraries, four of the total nineteen agencies in The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County system.

This study used the experimental group/control group experimental design. This design set-up formed the basis for comparison at each branch. There was a pretest period where no treatment was used at all, to set the standard for adult audiobook circulation at each branch. This was followed by the post-test experimental period where a separate promotional treatment was placed at each of three branches and the fourth served as a control. A poster was placed at the Main branch, a display at the Canfield branch, a recommended listening list at the Boardman branch, and the Austintown branch served as a control.

The treatments of a poster, display, and recommended listening list were the independent variables. Adult audiobook circulation was the dependent variable. Several possible intervening variables included: the reserve system used to transfer titles at patron request to a preferred branch, whether a patron owned a cassette player for cassette listening (at the time of this experiment this library system only had

audiobooks on cassette, not on CD), and individual audiobook program features, such as abridged or unabridged, date of publication, and condition of audiobook.

Since the loan period for an audiobook was three weeks, this experiment ran for two months: one month for the control pretest period, and one month for the experimental period. The one-month term allowed for a second loan period to begin within each experimental period.

Adult audiobook circulation statistics were generated by the automated circulation system of The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. There were separate statistics produced for each of the four agencies involved in the experiment. These statistics gave an adult audiobook circulation total and a total branch circulation total at the end of the first month pretest period. Another set of statistics gave an adult audiobook circulation total and a total branch circulation total for the second post-test experimental period. This experiment was only concerned with total overall audiobook circulation at each branch. Therefore, the circulation of individual titles was not monitored, even at the branch where some of the audiobooks were put on display.

The experiment began September 1, 1999, and normal adult audiobook circulation was monitored during a pretest period of one month at each above named agency. At the beginning of the next month, October 1, 1999, a poster was placed in the Main branch, a display at the Canfield branch, a recommended listening list at the Boardman branch, and the Austintown branch was used as a control with no promotional treatment used at all. Once again adult audiobook circulation statistics were produced at each of the four agencies, until this one month experimental period was completed, October 31, 1999.

Here are the specific details for the post-test experimental period which began October 1, 1999. Two professional posters promoting audiobooks and possible occasions for their use were made by the Graphic Arts department of The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. These were displayed at the Main branch: one in a prominent location near the library's catalog near the regular shelving of audiobooks, and the other on a small easel on the public service counter. A reproduction of this poster is found in Appendix A. At the Canfield branch a two-sided permanent display rack was already positioned along the path that ran from the door to the circulation desk. This was used for the prominent display of adult audiobooks. This was a continuous display, meaning that as audiobooks were selected from the display and checked-out, different titles of audiobooks replaced them. As audiobooks were returned to the library by the patron, they were shelved at their places on the regular shelving. The advantage of a continuous display was that patrons who found one good audiobook there might notice that different titles were used to replenish the display, and might return again to select another (Roy 1993). At the Boardman library there was a recommended listening list available for patrons to pick up in three separate areas: in a literature display holder located on the circulation desk, on a display shelf located at the end of the regular audiobook shelving, and also at the reference desk. Titles for the recommended listening list were chosen from the "Audie Awards Winners 1996-1999" winners list and the "1999 Audie Award Finalists" list. All titles chosen had holdings at the Boardman branch where the list was available for patron pick-up. This listening list is found in Appendix B. The Austintown branch served as a control with no promotional treatment used at all. All adult audiobooks at all agency locations remained at their

normal positions on the shelves, with the exception of those on the display at the Canfield branch.

In the tabulation each circulation was considered a distinct activity. Renewals counted as a separate circulation.

The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County had a reserve system involving nineteen agencies, which permitted patrons to request titles currently not available at a branch, yet available on the shelves at a different agency of the library system. As each patron picked up his reserve at the requesting agency, the circulation statistic was recorded electronically as this title was "checked-out." Therefore, no special tabulation was needed for reserves during this experiment.

At the end of the experimental period, any unfilled reserves for adult audiobooks, as noted by form #416 in the reserve box and dated during the second experimental period, were tallied and that number was added to the circulation count at each of the four branches involved in the experiment. Because that request was made during the experimental period, it was assumed that the treatment caused the request.

Reserves requested from the shelves of the experimental agencies from branches not involved in the experiment were not counted in the circulation at all. This was because if they were requested from an agency not involved in the experiment, then there was a reasonable certainty that one of the three promotional treatments did not cause the patron to make the request. Therefore, their circulation at the destination branch had no bearing in this experiment

Due to the enormous demographic differences between the branch libraries (and differences including physical size, diversity of collections, and specializations, just to

name a few), the library agencies were not compared to each other. Comparative statistics were analyzed for each individual agency to determine a percentage of the effect of the dependent variable. This percentage was then used in the merchandising treatment comparisons.

Following the experimental period, circulation statistics were tabulated and the data analyzed to compare the circulation during the pretest period to the circulation during the post-test experimental period. This was accomplished by the use of a chart, identifying for each library branch pretest audiobook circulation, the experimental period audiobook circulation, the difference in circulation for the two test periods noting whether it was an increase or decrease in circulation, and the percent of change. Then to take the first chart a step further, another chart identifying each library branch was used to take into consideration total branch circulation during both experimental periods, the difference in total circulation noting whether it was an increase or decrease in circulation, and the percent of change. Both the audiobook circulation and the total agency circulation were graphically presented to demonstrate which treatment, the poster, display, or recommended list, from its corresponding branch, had the preferred results of a greater percentage increase in circulation. Then the percentage change in audiobook circulation was compared with the percentage change in total branch circulation for the two test periods, and summarized as a percentage difference from the audiobook circulation to the total branch circulation for each agency. A concluding chart displayed the percentage of audiobook circulation as a part of the total branch circulation for both the pretest and experimental periods. The chi square test was used to show if the results were statistically significant.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Recalling that the treatments of a poster (at Main), display (at Canfield), and recommended listening list (at Boardman) were the independent variables and adult audiobook circulation the dependent variable with a control (at Austintown), the results of the experiment are shown in Table 1. An analysis revealed that the control, display,

Table 1. Audiobook Circulation

Agency	Pretest Period	Experimental Period	Difference	% Change
Austintown (control)	817	877	61	7.5%
Boardman (listening list)	2506	2599	93	3.7%
Canfield (display)	388	461	73	18.8%
Main (poster)	1455	1384	-71	-4.9%

and listening list all produced an increase in audiobook circulation from the pretest to the experimental period. Only the poster showed an actual decrease in the number of audiobooks checked-out. These statistics clearly revealed that the display resulted in a greater percentage increase in circulation at 18.8%, graphically presented in Figure 1.

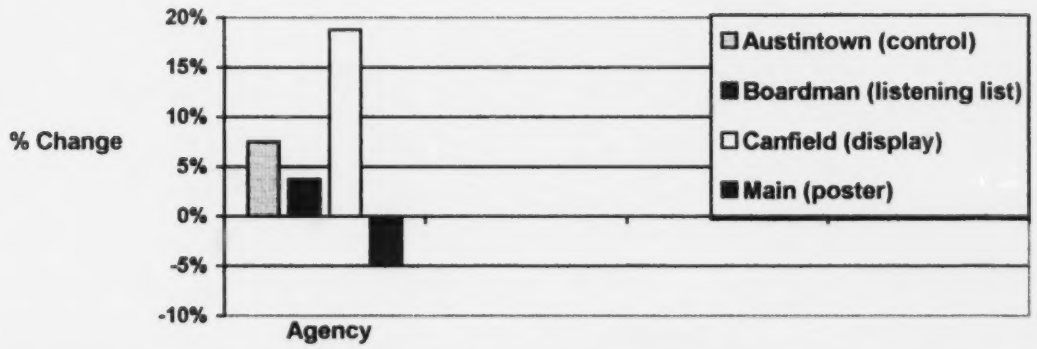


Fig. 1. Audiobook Circulation From Pretest to Experimental Period

Yet before drawing any conclusions from this data, it was necessary to take into account each agency's total circulation for both the pretest and experimental periods, as shown in Table 2. For the control at Austintown, the display at Canfield, and the

Table 2. Total Agency Circulation

Agency	Pretest Period	Experimental Period	Difference	% Change
Austintown (control)	16809	17875	1066	6.3%
Boardman (listening list)	35281	37273	1992	5.6%
Canfield (display)	9940	10578	638	6.4%
Main (poster)	19394	19244	-150	-0.8%

listening list at Boardman, all of these agencies showed an overall increase in total branch circulation from the pretest to the experimental periods, paralleling the trend found with the increase in the circulation of audiobooks for those periods. Also, corresponding to the decrease in audiobook circulation for the poster at Main, total agency circulation also decreased for that period. This is graphically shown in Figure 2.

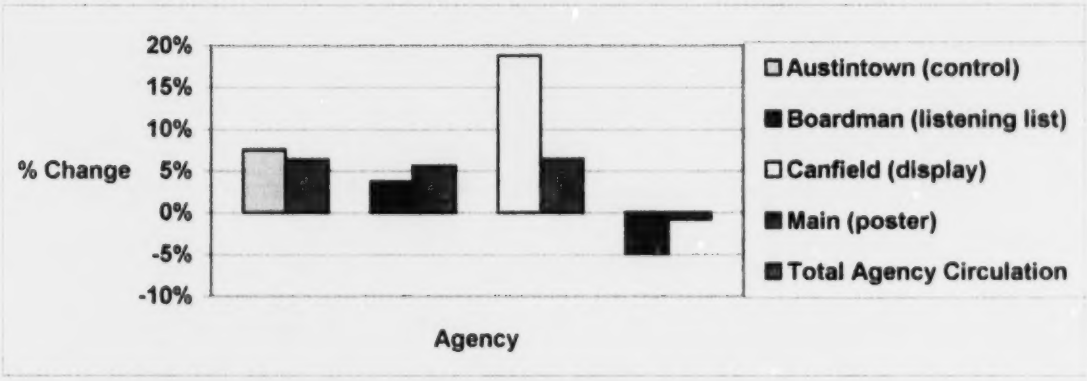


Fig. 2. Percentage of Audiobook Circulation and Total Agency Circulation From Pretest to Experimental Period

It was then necessary to compare these parallels in circulation between audiobook circulation and total agency circulation. Table 3, a combination of the resulting percentages from Tables 1 and 2, compared the percentage change in total agency circulation to the percentage change in audiobook circulation from the pretest to the experimental period, and the resulting percentage of difference in the audiobook over the total agency circulation.

Table 3. Percentage Change of Audiobook Circulation Over Total Agency Circulation From Pretest to Experimental Period

Agency	% Change Total Circulation	% Change in Audiobook Circulation	% Change in Audiobook Circulation From Total Circulation
Austintown (control)	6.3%	7.5%	0.8%
Boardman (listening list)	5.6%	3.7%	-1.9%
Canfield (display)	6.4%	18.8%	12.4%
Main (poster)	-0.8%	-4.9%	-4.1%

Table 3 revealed that for the control at Austintown there was only a small percentage of difference between the change in audiobook and total agency circulation, less than 1%, analyzing it to mean that with an expected rise in total agency circulation, a corresponding rise in audiobook circulation should be expected. Yet for the poster at Main there was a difference of a negative 4.1% and for the listening list at Boardman a difference of a negative 1.9%; clearly the audiobook circulation did not keep up the pace with the percentage of total agency circulation for this time period. Yet, for the display at Canfield, there was a difference of a positive 12.4%. Was this larger percentage of circulation significant enough to use to draw conclusions as to the effect of a display on the circulation of audiobooks?

A further examination of the data revealed that audiobooks maintained a relatively constant percentage of the total circulation throughout the pretest and experimental periods. For the control at Austintown, audiobooks maintained a constant 4.9% of the

Table 4. Percentage of Audiobook Circulation in Total Circulation

Agency	Pretest Period			Experimental Period		
	Audiobook Circulation	Total Circulation	% Audiobooks in Total Circ	Audiobook Circulation	Total Circulation	% Audiobooks in Total Circ
Austintown (control)	817	16809	4.9%	877	17875	4.9%
Boardman (listening list)	2506	35281	7.1%	2599	37273	7.0%
Canfield (display)	388	9940	3.9%	461	10578	4.4%
Main (poster)	1455	19394	7.5%	1384	19244	7.2%

total circulation for both the pretest and experimental periods, demonstrating that the rise in audiobook circulation for the experimental period did indeed correspond to the rise in total circulation for that period. For the listening list at Boardman, the rise in total agency circulation was only one tenth of a percent higher than the rise in audiobook circulation. The display at Canfield showed the greatest percentage rise in audiobook circulation over total agency circulation, yet the actual percentage still fluctuated only from 3.9% to 4.4% of the total circulation. For the poster at Main, the decrease in audiobook circulation closely paralleled the decrease in total agency circulation; audiobooks fluctuated only from 7.5% to 7.2% of the total agency circulation. Therefore, when total agency circulation for the pretest and experimental periods was taken into consideration and with audiobook circulation maintaining a relatively constant percentage of this total agency circulation, did the use of a poster, display, and recommended listening list cause an increase in the circulation of audiobooks?

The chi square test was then used to determine if the observed increases/changes in audiobook circulation could be proven to be caused by the merchandising treatment used. The first step in the chi square test was to state the null hypothesis; there was no real effect produced by each merchandising treatment on the increase in audiobook circulation, other than that which could be attributed to chance (the alternative would be that there was an effect produced by each merchandising treatment on the increase in audiobook circulation that cannot be reasonably attributed to chance). According to the Chi Square Distribution Table, with one degree of freedom the 0.05 significance level for the one tail test is 2.706. The chi square value for the listening list at Boardman was 0.406, the chi square value for the display at Canfield was 2.378, and the chi square value for the poster at Main was 1.149 (Note: the chi square value was computed for the poster even though there was a decrease in audiobook circulation because there was a corresponding decrease in total agency circulation). All chi square values were less than the 0.05 significance level of 2.706. Therefore, the null hypothesis is confirmed: there was no effect of the poster, display, and listening list on the increase in audiobook circulation other than that which could be attributed to chance alone. The increase in audiobook circulation for all treatments was not found to be statistically significant.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reconsidering the original hypothesis that the librarian's use of a poster, display and recommended listening list would result in the increased library circulation of audiobooks, the data analysis is clear. The treatments of a display and listening list did result in an observed increase in audiobook circulation. In fact, the display showed an increase of 18.8% in audiobook circulation over the pretest period. The librarian's use of a poster resulted in a decrease in circulation, yet this decrease did correspond to a total agency decrease in circulation for that period. Yet after final computation of the data, which took into consideration both the audiobook and the total agency circulation for the pretest and experimental periods, the increases in circulation observed were found not to be statistically significant, so the first part of the original hypothesis was not supported.

The second part of the original hypothesis proposed that the librarian's use of a display would produce the preferred results, a greater increase in circulation over the recommended listening list and the poster. Examination of the data revealed that the display did produce a greater percentage of increase in circulation, well above the other merchandising treatments. Yet statistically this increase also was found not to be significant. Therefore, the second part of the hypothesis was also rejected.

This confirmed the results of the studies by Williams (1998) and Bickle (1996), that the merchandising treatments used specifically for the librarian's promotion of nonprint formats, specifically audiobooks and videos, did not show a significant increase in

circulation. At the same time, this result was in direct conflict with the book display study by Goldhor (1972), whose experiments involving the merchandising of books did indeed confirm most significantly that both displays and recommended lists were effective in increasing use, with book displays producing the greatest effect. The studies of Aguilar (1982) and Taylor (1982) also confirmed his book display results, and Parrish (1986) concluded from her experiment that the use of a book list did increase circulation.

These results imply that previous research results on the merchandising of books to increase circulation cannot be transferred to the nonprint format. There may be several reasons for this. There may be inherent characteristics of the audiobook format, possible intervening variables, that exclude some people from its selection. Access to a cassette player is essential before an audiobook is selected, yet many of the newest model automobiles are coming equipped with CD players, not cassette players. Personal preference of abridged versus unabridged, and its availability in the preferred form, could also influence audiobook selection. Perhaps limitations such as these were obstacles to the check-out of an audiobook, and had an effect on the results of this study.

Perhaps users choose audiobooks differently than they choose books and other library formats. It could be that listeners rely more on the titles available to them at the library as concluded by Davis (1999), whereas with books patrons often have a specific information need or interest they are seeking.

Yet there could have been other reasons for the observed results. The recommended listening list may have produced higher circulation had the experiment

run for a longer time period. Most people do not examine a recommended list the moment they pick it up, but usually take it home to read first before requesting a title. Sometimes they may set it down and wait a week or even longer before making a request that looks interesting. The experimental period only ran for one month. It was possible that some people actually returned to make their requests after the experimental period had ended.

Also, had the listening list been placed in checked-out books instead of being left for voluntary pick-up, perhaps a higher circulation may have resulted. Taylor had concluded that book lists left for voluntary pick up were not effective (1982). Through distribution in checked-out books, the listening list would have reached many more patrons.

The chi square value for the display was 2.378, only .328 from the critical value at the 0.05 significance level of 2.706 for a one tail test with one degree of freedom. The display value was close to the significance level, but not quite close enough to yield significant results. Yet because this value of 2.378 was very close to the 2.706 critical level, it seems to suggest that the display "almost" caused a significant increase in circulation "almost" more than could be attributed to chance alone. This may be an indication that further studies with audiobook display might be appropriate.

All of these questions lead to implications for further research. How do patrons choose library materials? The study by Baker (1986) suggested that since previous studies have shown that most patrons choose books by browsing, patrons use narrowing devices to compensate for information overload in the library. Yet the poster, display, and listening list, as narrowing devices to audiobooks, did not produce

significant results. Perhaps a study involving the librarian personally recommending audiobooks to patrons, in addition to the three treatments used, would increase their circulation. Could this personal interaction with users produce significant audiobook merchandising results?

Another implication for further study could involve the inclusion of juvenile audiobooks in addition to the adult books-on-cassette, to add more diversity into the audiobook selections available. Would using the same three merchandising treatments, the poster, display, and recommended listening list, for promotion by the librarian then result in a significant increase in circulation? Did this study overlook our most important users – our youth?

There are several more questions that could make interesting audiobook merchandising studies. Would the use of other merchandising techniques, such as a bookmark or an advertising promotion on the library Web page, have the effect of an increase in the circulation of audiobooks? If the children's librarian would use audiobooks in the programming, would the circulation increase? Would a link on the library Web site allowing users to give comments and summaries on specific audiobooks increase their circulation?

In conclusion, audiobooks do serve to fulfill the educational, informational, and recreational needs of the community as spelled out in the mission of many libraries. The nonfiction and fiction content diversity within an audiobook collection can fulfill several of the roles a public library may choose to adopt, such as popular materials center, independent learning center, formal education support center, and preschooler's door to learning (now often updated to be called children's door to learning). Although

the results of this experiment were not found to be statistically significant, it is still important for librarians to address the issue of merchandising the audiobook collection, an important format providing benefits to many patrons. Yet even more important is the need for librarians to merchandise, to merchandise and market the library's collection. Hopefully this study will serve as an impetus to other librarians to try a variety of promotional techniques to increase patron awareness and use of the many resources the public library's collection has to offer.

APPENDIX A

Poster

"Hear" a Good Book Today!

A draft of the poster

used to promote audiobooks

and possible occasions for their use

"HEAR" a Good Book Today!

Books-on-Cassette:
Ready Whenever You Are!

"Listen" to a good book anytime: walking, driving, working, relaxing! Available here!

PUBLIC LIBRARY YOUNGSTOWN & MAHONING COUNTY

The Library

19 LOCATIONS *and* **THE WEB**
WWW.LIBRARYVISIT.ORG

APPENDIX B

Recommended Listening List

"Hear" a Good Book Today!

A brochure of audiobook titles available at

The Public Library of Youngstown

And Mahoning County

Bibliographies / Memoirs

Angela's Ashes :A Memoir
by Frank McCourt

A poignant memoir of Frank McCourt's youth, growing up in poverty in Ireland and New York.

Still Me
by Christopher Reeve

Hear from Christopher Reeve himself the details of his riding accident and its affect on his life.

Wait Till Next Year: A Memoir
by Doris Kearns Goodwin

Brooklyn in the 50's, this memoir weaves Dodger baseball into the experiences of author Goodwin's childhood.

Educational / How-To

Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs
By Lang Elliott

A learning guide to the bird songs of over 370 species.

The Wonder of Boys
By Michael Gurian

Learn ways to teach your son about life, through discipline and a strong parent relationship.

Word-by-Word
By Anne Lamott

Learn to write word-by-word through this writing workshop.

Poetry / Plays

How the West Was Read
By Robert J. Pandisi

Eight classic tales take you back to the rugged American West.

Grow Old Along With Me the Best is Yet to Be
By Sandra Haldeman Martz

Baby boomers will enjoy these stories and poems that reflect life as they turn fifty.

Mark Twain: Letters From the Earth
Adapted by McAvoy

A Twain you might have missed, yet one you're sure to talk about.

Road to Mecca
By Athol Fugard

A depressed Miss Helen is supported by her friend Elsa, as she is about to enter a nursing home in this engaging play.

Travel / History

Charles Kurait's America
By Charles Kuralt

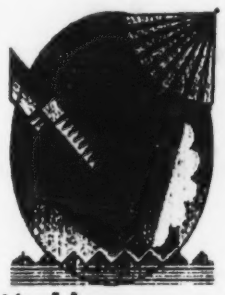
Tour America each month of the year with Charles Kuralt, our veteran traveler.

Lewis & Clark
By Dayton Duncan

Join the thrilling expedition of Lewis & Clark, with Sacagawea, in their search for the Northwest Passage.

"HEAR" a Good Book Today!

Books-on-Cassette: Ready Whenever You Are!



Working...

Exercising...

Driving...

PUBLIC LIBRARY YOUNGSTOWN & MAHONING COUNTY

The Library

19 LOCATIONS and THE WEB
WWW.LIBRARYVISIT.ORG

Personal Development/ Self -Help

The Gift of Fear
By Gavin De Becker
Learn how to recognize and deal with a possible attacker before its too late.

How Good Do We Have to Be
by Harold S. Kushner
Kushner explains how to handle guilt and forgiveness to help us become satisfied with who we are.

Make the Connection
By Bob Greene and Oprah Winfrey
Oprah makes the connection with Green's "10 steps to a better body", to share her experiences with weight loss.

Marilu Henner's Total Health Makeover
By Marilu Henner
Learn Henner's ten basic steps to become a healthier and happier you!

Business

Learn to Earn
By Peter Lynch
Learn the basics of investing, starting with the stock market section in the newspaper.

Putting the One-Minute Manager to Work
By Kenneth H.Blanchard
A great management aid to put to practical use.

Inspirational / Spiritual

Amazing Grace
By Jonathan Kozol
This is the story of several destitute children growing up in the South Bronx, who despite the greatest of adversities, are able to preserve their natural character.

Conversations with God
By Neale Donald Walsch
Find out what happens when author Walsch writes a letter to God.

The Greatest Story Ever Told
By Fulton Oursler
Listen to the Gospels through this realistic story of the Biblical events of the era.

Humor

Definitive Biography of P.D.Q. Bach
By Professor Peter Schickele
Meet P.D.Q. Bach, the make-believe son of J.S. Bach, in this humorous satire of his imaginary life.

Garrison Keillor's Comedy Theatre
By Garrison Keillor
Tune in and relax to Keillor's humorous comedy production. Fun!

Pure Drivel
By Steve Martin
Enjoy comedian Steve Martin as he presents some of his best stories.

Fiction

Summer Sisters
By Judy Blume
A strong friendship develops between two adolescent girls on their yearly summer vacations at Martha's Vineyard.

Cold Mountain
By Charles Frazier
The Civil War story of Inman, a wounded confederate soldier, who struggles to return to his home on Cold Mountain.

Reservation Road
By John Burnham Schwartz
After a hit-and-run driver kills a young boy, a web of deception develops in this haunting thriller.

Miscellaneous

James Herriott's Animal Stories
by James Herriott
Animal lovers take heed! Ten wonderful animal stories to capture your fancy.

The Glory of Their Times
By Lawrence S. Ritter
Travel back in time to the beginning of baseball, to the players and the nostalgia of this glorious era.

Hop Frog: Hop Frog
By Edgar Allan Poe
A classic Poe, the evil king is the object of the court jester's revenge.

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